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TAGS: PGOV HA
SUBJECT: "NEGOTIATIONS" OR NOT, GOH SCRAMBLES FOR WAY TO
DEAL WITH GANGS

Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson, reason 1.5(d).

¶1. (C/NOFORN) Summary and Comment. Senior GOH officials tell us privately that the GOH is scrambling for a way to address Port-au-Prince's continuing gang violence. President Preval remains wedded to his carrot and stick approach for the time being and has instructed senior staff members to meet with the gangs in Cite Soleil, most recently late last week. He himself met with one gang member last week without result. According to State Secretary for Public Security Eucher (protect), Preval's patience with the gangs is not inexhaustible; he will give them "weeks, not months" to lay down their arms. MINUSTAH continues to participate in discussions with the Preval team on the violence but Preval has kept the UN forces response tightly constrained. Public pressure for action from a variety of sources is growing as kidnappings continue. Preval's end game in all this remains unclear: ambivalent about unleashing MINUSTAH against the gangs, Preval may find that his hand is forced as public anger about the gangs' seeming impunity grows and his leadership is questioned. End Summary and Comment.

¶2. (C/NOFORN) Senior GOH officials tell us privately that the GOH is searching for a way to address Port-au-Prince's continuing violence. President Preval used last Thursday's visit of UNSYG Kofi Annan to reveal that the GOH has launched a "dialogue" with the gangs. Prime Minister Alexis told me that "negotiations" were underway with the gangs, but carefully backtracked when I called him on it. Whatever the term, the Presidency has now launched talks with gang leaders both directly and indirectly and that fact is becoming increasing public. According to newly appointed State Secretary for Public Security (protect) Joseph Eucher,

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Presidential Counselor Bob Manuel met with the gangs leaders last week and invited them to meet with Preval at the Presidency. Apparently, only one Cite Soleil gang leader, Ti Blanc, showed up as the others, fearing a trap, skipped the session with the President. Subsequently, Ti Blanc told the local Reuters correspondent that "we want to disarm...but disarmament should be done without bias." (A reference, we believe, to others that the gangs think are equally guilty of violence, such as Guy Philippe.)

¶3. (C) Eucher told me that the Preval administration has a clear strategy: first the olive branch and then MINUSTAH. At the same time, he notes, the international community must be ready to assist the residents of the slums through social and

economic development programs. The olive branch that Preval held out last week would not last forever, Eucher contends, although he refused to provide a time line except to say that it was measured in "weeks not months." The President must attempt to persuade the gangs to disarm peacefully before letting MINUSTAH and the HNP take them on, Eucher said. This carrot and stick approach, he argues, is the only one which will yield results without hurting innocent victims. He added that the UNSYG's call for resources to address the crime issue in the MINUSTAH mandate report will be a help to the GOH which has yet to establish fully functioning police.

¶4. (C) UN SRSG Mulet, who spent most of August 4 and 5 huddled with the GOH, told me that the President has given MINUSTAH specific guidelines to deal with the gangs. Anyone outside of Cite Soleil may be stopped, arrested and shot if necessary to prevent a violent crime. However, Cite Soleil remains fenced off. Preval has specifically told Mulet "not to put any pressure on Cite Soleil." Frustrated, the SRSG has asked the GOH for a map outlining the "no-go" zones to ensure that MINUSTAH follows the President's instructions exactly. In the meantime, Mulet reports, on August 3, HNP Director General Andresol, UN Police Commissioner Muir and others went to the gang-infested suburb of Martissant and located a building in which to establish a permanent HNP/MINUSTAH presence. This represents, according to Mulet, the HNP's first police station in the area and is key to getting the GOH back in Martissant. The building will be staffed with HNP, UNPOL, DDR and humanitarian aid officials. Mulet noted that this is an important step, as was HNP's return to the Belair area three weeks ago after a long absence due to the violence there. He expects MINUSTAH will have similar problems getting the HNP back to Cite Soleil if it quiets down. "They are just scared," he observed.

¶5. (C) Whatever discussions are now underway, pressure

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continues to build on Preval and Alexis to act. The past weekend's attack on the Rue Delmas residence of a noted local businessman, which resulted in his death and the kidnapping of his wife, has upped the angst level in town. Although Preval has been soundly criticized by the business community and politicians (including the Lavalas party group), most recently by Senate President Lambert, for "negotiating" with the gangs, most contacts with whom we talk have acknowledged that there is no easy way to end the violence, much of which is random in nature. In a recent roundtable with seven leading business leaders, our interlocutors decried the president's negotiations with the gangs but offered no alternatives apart from letting MINUSTAH "fix it." One observed that Preval's fixation on the Cite Soleil gangs, while understandable, tends to obscure the broader security problems Haiti faces, such as the encroachment of drugs and pervasive corruption within Haitian society.

Parliamentarians have been equally vociferous in their criticism of MINUSTAH, alleging that the UN's lack of action has brought Haiti to this juncture, but there now appears to be a growing understanding that MINUSTAH will not act without presidential authorization.

¶6. (C/NOFORN) That authorization will come shortly, Bob Manuel avers. Although somewhat reluctant to discuss his current contacts with the gangs (despite the fact that Port-au-Prince is buzzing about them to the extent of claiming that money has changed hands), Manuel insists that Preval will not shy away from the tough decisions necessary to deal with the violence. Preval is not afraid of the gangs as some have suggested, Manuel said, but he does not see them as a long term threat and he does need time to act. After all, Manuel reminded me, we have only been in government a few months, give us time.

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